

Exodus 32:14-35 - Thursday, June 11th, 2009

- Three weeks ago, we left off in verse 13, which was a terrible place to end, so now we'll sort of need to recap what's happening here.
- God just told Moses about the golden calf Aaron made for Israel to worship, and that he wants to destroy them and start over with him.
- Moses intercedes for the Israelites even to the point of begging God to remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

14 So the LORD relented (KJV says repented) from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

- As you might imagine, this verse can create a difficulty for some because it can be misunderstood to mean that God changes His mind.
- Perhaps a way to understand this would be for one to see it this way; "Moses isn't changing God's mind, he is sharing God's mind."

"We are not to think of Moses as altering God's purpose towards Israel by this prayer, but as carrying it out: Moses was never more like God than in such moments, for he shared God's mind and loving purpose." R. Alan Cole

- An even greater difficulty is to take the KJV translation of "repented," because to do that changes the whole complexion of the text.
- In so doing, the implication would be that God had done evil, and thus, He needed to repent. Clearly, this is an incorrect interpretation.

Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? NKJV

- So, does this mean Numbers 23:19 and our text in Exodus 32:14 are a contradiction in the Bible? Absolutely not and here's why:
- This is what's known as "anthropomorphism," which is "morphing" a concept of God represented in human terms and terminology.
- In other words, this is God's way of representing Himself to us at our level, and in order to do that He speaks "after the manner of men."

"I suppose that I need not say that this verse speaks after the manner of men. I do not know after what other manner we can speak. To speak of God after the manner of God, is reserved for God himself; and mortal men could not comprehend such speech. In this sense, the Lord often speaks, not according to the literal fact, but according to the appearance of things to us, in order that we may understand so far as the human can comprehend the divine."

Charles Spurgeon

- Presupposing I can get my human mind around that, there may still remain an unanswered question; "is God going back on His Word."
- God has told Moses that His wrath has burned hot and that He wants him out of His way so that He can consume them from the earth.
- Now God is not going to do what He said He would do. Does this mean that He's going back on His Word by not following through? No!

- As one said it: "God's promises of judgment are inherently meant to call men to repentance and prayer and therefore avert judgment."

Ezekiel 33:13-16 13 When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die. 14 Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16 None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live. NKJV

- Also, God didn't need Moses to get out of the way so He could destroy them, He could have just done it. He's sort of directing Moses.
- Again, I believe God knew what Moses would do which is why God did what He did and this is why God did it the way He did it.

- So why do I need to know all this? It's important we know and understand who God is and how God is in the way He transacts with us.
- See, if I don't know this, I will misunderstand Who and how God is, thus I would think of Him as a God of wrath, not a God of mercy.

15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. 16 Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

- With God's Word in his hands, Moses leaves this mountain top experience, and is now on his way down to deal with the Israelites.
- One can only imagine what is going through Moses' mind as he is going down the mountain. If it were me, I stay on up there with God.
- Sometimes we, like Moses, have to leave the mountain-top experience and get down to the business of dealing with life stuff.

"It is no small trial to come down from communion with God to battle with other men's sins. This may fall to our lot this day. The Lord prepares us for it."

Charles Spurgeon

- There's something else here that I want to mention but I need to hasten to say that I'm not at all dogmatic about this, but did notice this.
- The two tablets were written on both sides which had the 10 Commandments, the Law or Word of God, but it was also the Work of God.
- What's so interesting about this detail is that there is another reference in Revelation to a writing which is on both sides of a scroll.

Revelation 5:1-5 1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne **a scroll with writing on both sides** and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." NIV

- Here's what I'm thinking: both the tablets and this scroll which were written on both sides, speak to and were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.
- In Jewish history, there are examples of certain kinds of documents which had writing on both sides then sealed with seven seals.
- These documents were title deeds to property, and would only have writing on one side, that is unless it couldn't be paid for in full.

- In the unfortunate event that the owner would default on the property payments, he would then be forced to relinquish his title deed.
- Upon its relinquishment, this title deed will now have written on the other side, all the debts that could not be paid, then receive 7 seals.
- Here's where it gets really interesting, the property could be redeemed if the debt was paid in full and if it was within a 7 year period.

- Again, I'm not dogmatic about this but I am intrigued by this because the significance of this is profound in the prophetic picture it paints.
- The law like the scroll could only be fulfilled by, opened by, paid for in full by, none other than the person of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
- And to think that some believe the Old Testament is just that; "old," and doesn't apply to us because we're in the New Covenant.

- This is what I so love about studying and teaching the Old Testament. The Old Testament conceals what the New Testament reveals.
- This is why we simply teach the whole Bible, simply, from Genesis to Revelation, book by book, chapter by chapter, and verse by verse.

2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: KJV

- 17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp."
 18 But he said: "It is not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, But the sound of singing I hear."
- Along the way down from the mountain, Joshua rejoins Moses and as they get closer to the camp of the Israelites Joshua hears shouts.
 - He tells Moses that he thinks it's the "noise of war." Moses says it's not the shouts of victory nor the cry of defeat they're partying!
 - What's interesting about this is that Moses knew what was going on but Joshua didn't, not yet anyway. However, he is about to find out.

19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

- When Moses sees the calf and what they're doing around the calf, he becomes so angry he throws the tablets down and broke them.
- It has been suggested that the breaking of the tablets was a reflection of and symbolic of the breaking of the Law with the golden calf.

"It was a symbolical action testifying his great abhorrence of sin, and his zeal for the Lord of hosts. He felt that tables written with God's finger would be polluted by being brought among such a people."

Charles Spurgeon

- A question is raised here about Moses' anger because later on it will be Moses' anger that will keep him out of the Promised Land.
- One thought is that this is a righteous anger on the part of Moses because there is anger on the part of God and He is Righteous.

20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.

- This is interesting; Moses takes the calf, burns it, then grinds it to powder and scatters it on the water, and makes them drink it.
- Why does Moses do this? One commentator suggests that it was to show them that this god was no god at all if it could be consumed.

- There's a striking contrast that can be missed at first glance; the true God didn't consume them but the false God is consumed by them.
- There's another contrast as well; Aaron feared man and made a god, Moses feared the Lord and made them drink their manmade god.

21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?"

- Wow, what an amazing question, Moses knows his older brother well enough to know that this whole golden calf thing was not his idea.
- He also knows Aaron well enough to know that he's prone to fear man. The fear of man is harmful in that it brings sin and a snare.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe. NKJV

22 So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. 23 For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24 And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

- As God is my witness Moses, all I did was put their gold into a fire and; "poof" out came this calf. I've never seen anything like this!
- We know this is a flat out lie because verse four tells us that he molded it and even engraved it. His markings were all over it.
- It would seem that Aaron is digging himself a deeper puka and has no way out, and you would think that God is going to take him out.

Deuteronomy 9:19-21 19 I feared the anger and wrath of the LORD, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the LORD listened to me. 20 And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too. 21 Also I took that sinful thing of yours, the calf you had made, and burned it in the fire. Then I crushed it and ground it to powder as fine as dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain. NIV

25 Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies),²⁶ then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the LORD's side -- come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

- I have to warn you that it's about to get really ugly, really fast. Moses sees that they were unrestrained and has to do something quick.
- He stands at the camp entrance and tells them that anyone who is on the Lord's side needs to gather themselves together with him.

- It's most interesting that it's the tribe of Levi who ends up siding with the Lord, and boldly taking a stand against their very own people.
- It has been suggested that because of the Levites willingness to do this that they became the only tribe to perform the priestly service.

27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'"²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.²⁹ Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

- I told you it was going to get ugly. It's interesting that we're given the detail of three thousand men being put to death that day.
- I believe that one reason for this is because of what we're told in the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church.

2 Corinthians 3:6 6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. KJV

- In other words, the law brings death, but the spirit brings life. The wages of sin, or breaking the law, is death, but the gift of God is life.
- When the law came down in this day, 3,000 died, when the Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved.

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. NIV

30 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."³¹ Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold!

- The atonement that Moses is speaking of only speaks of covering in the Old Testament. In the New, it's not covering, it's washing.
- Also, notice the prerequisite for the atonement of their sin; a mediator, in this case Moses, goes up to the Lord as an intercessor.
- In concert with the intercession is the confession of the sin, specifically. To confess is to concede and that's how Moses will intercede.

32 Yet now, if You will forgive their sin -- but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

- This is amazing; Moses is willing to make the sacrifice and actually be damned in order for God to not blot them out of the book of life.
- The beloved Apostle Paul did the same thing in the New Testament. He was actually willing to be cursed for the Jews to be saved.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: KJV

- Both Moses and Paul were willing to do this, but didn't, however there was one Who was not only willing to do this but actually did.
- Of course I'm speaking of none other than Jesus Christ Himself Who took upon Himself the curse of our sin that we might be saved.

33 And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."³⁴ Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." ³⁵ So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

- Here God tells Moses that He will forgive the nation as a whole, though there will still be consequences for the great sin they committed.
- In addition to this, there seems to be an indication that those who were culpable for causing this would be blotted out from His book.
- However, God does promise Moses that His Angel, believed to be His Son Jesus, would be present with them and lead them.